

## WORLD HEALTH DAY

*World Health Day, 7 April, is an annual event marking the anniversary of the coming into force of the Constitution of the World Health Organization. Its aim is to interest the public in a theme of importance for the health of mankind. The theme for 1976 is: "Foresight Prevents Blindness", about which Dr H. Mahler, Director-General of the World Health Organization said:*

There are at least 10 million totally blind people in the world today. Millions more have such defective sight that they must be regarded as blind for the purpose of education, work and social assistance. Their numbers are increasing and unless action is taken they could double in the next 25 years.

Throughout the developing world, two-thirds of this blindness is estimated to be preventable or curable. Even in the most advanced countries much of the blindness is preventable.

Prevention is important in all the world but particularly in the developing world where most preventable blindness occurs—that caused by trachoma, xerophthalmia and onchocerciasis—and where cure is possible only to the few because of lack of adequate health services.

Early treatment will cure trachoma before the eye is damaged; administration of vitamin A to children will prevent xerophthalmia; vector control will prevent onchocerciasis.

Other more long-term measures also have a part to play in controlling eye infections—better sanitation; cleaner and more abundant water; improvement of personal and environmental hygiene.

In all parts of the world simple measures would make an immediate impact on the problem. Education of health workers and parents on these measures is necessary.

For example:

- Early detection and early treatment of eye trouble, especially in children. This means impressing on health workers and parents the importance of simple regular inspections;
- Provision of eye protectors for certain workers and insistence on their being worn; control of dangerous tools in industry; improvements in the safety of toys.

Blindness caused by cataract could and should be treated on a large scale by simple and cheap operations in countries of high incidence.

To a large extent the resources are there; it is a question of utilizing them and putting men and money into their application.

Half a dollar will treat a case of trachoma—5 dollars will remove a cataract—12 US cents will buy enough vitamin A to protect a child from xerophthalmia for a year.

Many governments already have highpowered blindness prevention campaigns under way. We hope that many more will be encouraged to follow suit, and perhaps to accord still higher priorities to such campaigns. Loss of sight is not merely a personal tragedy for the individual concerned: it represents a marked loss in strictly financial terms for the national wealth of the country where he or she lives.

Prevention of blindness is a relatively uncomplex field of medical activity where we can say: the more funds and the more practical assistance we receive, the more positive good we can bring about in the world. Forewarned, fore-armed and with foresight, we can make sure that our World Health Day slogan has real meaning in every corner of our planet: foresight *can* prevent blindness.

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